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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000880

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STATE FOR NEA/ARPI, S/WCI

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TAGS: [KAWC](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: VISIT OF AMERICAN LAWYERS STIRS UP GTMO ISSUE

REF: A. STATE 97796

1B. MANAMA 621

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is an action message -- see para 8.

12. (C) Summary: Two Amcit attorneys from law firm Dorsey and Whitney, which represents on a pro bono basis the six Bahraini detainees at Guantanamo, visited Bahrain June 13-15 to meet with family members, MPs, activists, and government officials. The lawyers urged the GOB to be more forceful in using diplomatic channels to press for the release or return of the six. The lower house of parliament held a special session on GTMO June 14, and a prominent MP complained of mistreatment of the detainees and asked that the government work harder for their return. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Abdul Ghaffar, speaking at parliament, insisted the government was doing its best and noted that the USG had refused a Bahraini offer to form a joint committee on the detainees. The Embassy could help to set the record straight if Washington agencies provided information that could be used publicly to push back on the point that the six Bahraini detainees are innocent and wrongly held. End Summary.

13. (U) Amcit attorneys Mark Sullivan and Joshua Colangelo-Bryan from law firm Dorsey and Whitney visited Bahrain June 13-15 and met with family members of the six Bahraini detainees in Guantanamo, members of parliament, NGO representatives, human rights activists, and government officials. Dorsey and Whitney has represented the Bahraini detainees on a pro bono basis for two years and Colangelo-Bryan has visited GTMO twice in the past year. The visit was the first time the lawyers met with family members and officials.

14. (C) During a June 13 press conference, the attorneys urged the GOB to use diplomatic channels to press for the release of the detainees. Colangelo-Bryan said the long-term viability of the GTMO detention center was being openly questioned in the U.S., and the present time represents the best opportunity for the GOB to get the detainees returned to Bahrain. Sullivan and Colangelo-Bryan told the press June 15 that they had held "breakthrough talks" with Bahraini authorities, led by MFA Assistant Under Secretary for Coordination and Follow Up Shaikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, on the way forward in handling the detainee situation. The MFA reportedly agreed to take the lawyers' suggestion of pushing harder for the detainees' release through diplomatic channels. Colangelo-Bryan told the press, "We urged them to negotiate with the U.S. for the release of the detainees, on the condition that they will be held in custody for investigation here in Bahrain, and they were very receptive." (Note: Shaikh Abdul Aziz did not raise the issue during a June 19 meeting with Pol/Econ chief on other subjects.)

15. (U) The Council of Representatives (COR - lower house of parliament) held a special session on GTMO June 14. Head of the Al Asala (Salafi) bloc Adel Al Moawada complained of detainees being "treated like animals" and asked why no Bahraini detainees have been returned when Bahrain is such a staunch ally of the United States. Al Moawada claimed there was no evidence linking the Bahrainis to Al Qaeda.

16. (C) Minister of State for Foreign Affairs/Information Minister Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar told the COR that the GOB held regular meetings with the American Ambassador and U.S. officials on behalf of the detainees. He continued that the government was "doing its best" and had asked the USG to free the Bahrainis "because everyone knows they are innocent." Abdul Ghaffar said that the GOB's request to form a joint committee on the detainees had been refused by the U.S. The press subsequently reported that the GOB had sent a diplomatic note to the USG expressing Bahrain's readiness to receive the detainees. The note also indicated Bahrain's willingness to take them to the public prosecutor's office for investigation and trial and, if convicted, to imprison them. GOB sources told the press that the USG had refused the proposal. (Comment: This is accurate; see refelts.)

17. (C) Comment: The GOB has been very cautious about pushing us on the issue of the detainees, perhaps because it prefers not to have to take possession of and responsibility for the six detainees. Although we might expect stronger approaches based upon the press readout of the meeting between the American lawyers and Bahraini officials, Shaikh Abdul Aziz chose not to raise the issue in the first opportunity he had since the visit. Bahraini press coverage and the remarks of parliamentarians repeatedly stress the innocence of the six. Unfortunately, it has become the common and accepted perception here that the Bahraini detainees are in fact innocent. Concurrent press reports of detainee abuse at Guantanamo add to the perception that Bahrain is being treated unfairly by its American ally.

18. (C) Action request: By not commenting directly on the detainees, we have in effect ceded the ground to the lawyers, family members, politicians and other critics of the detention of the six Bahrainis at Guantanamo. The Embassy would appreciate consideration of points that could be used publicly in Bahrain to push back on the point that the detainees are innocent and wrongly held.

MONROE